

Maritime Trade of Ancient Tamils with the East and West

theSpecial reference to Arikamedu

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Arikamedu and Rome –Ancient Trade contact

The place which is 5 kms away from Puduchery is known as, "Arikamedu". It is located on the banks of the river Ariyankuppam near Kakaiyanthoppu, enroute Ariyankuppam and Virampattinam, which is 20 feet in height in the form of a mound. Today this place exists as clam and humble garden area. The very same place was once flourished as a multi – national port city. During ancient period, this place was inhabited by the people who were hailed from different countries and they spoke many different languages. On the basis of trade and commerce they mingled with one another.

In the beginning years of the 18th century very few Christian Fathers lived in Puducherry. They instituted missionaries at Arikamedu and did their religious services. They never knew about the ancient podukal's history or specialty. Later, in 1769 A D, Le Gentil, a French astronomical expert came to Puducherry for his research. He personally visited the Veerampattinam and Arikamedu areas. In his travel accounts he mentions about an Arukansilai (Buddha Statue) which was discovered by him. By this finding the place of Arikamedu won 1st and became noticeable by the historians (researchers).

Later in the early years of the 20th century 1937 AD, Joyveae Dubraille, a physics professor, Puduvai-French college visited Arikamedu many times to see the ruins of the Christian Missionary. On one such visit, he recovered a ring which has the sculpted figure of a Roman emperor, Agustas Ceaser from Arikamedu. This discovery ignited him to understand the past glory of Arikamedu and he felt elated. This finding confirmed that before 2000 years, Arikamedu existed as a place of seat for the Romans. This interpretation helped to confirm the Roman's contact in India in an exclamatory way.

After the demise of Bharathiyar, 16 years later, Prof. Jouveae Dubreui's intensive research discovered that an ancient place existed at Arikamedu on the banks of the river Ariyankuppam near the

village Veerampattinam. He first discovered that the place had a close marine trade link with Rome. Due to his continuous effort, the excavations were carried out in different parts of the region. At the end of 1947-48, in the 3rd excavation Mr. J. M. Casal and his wife Genevieve Casal with much dedication led to the publication of a report. Similar attempts and participation in the research recalls the work of Mr. Bashere, Mr. V. Gouloubew, Mr. Henri Marchal, ASI director Mr. Rao Bagadur Deekshit, Hyderabad state Archaeology, Department director Mr. Quavajer Muhammad Ahmad.

Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) Research:

In 1944, the then Chief Director of ASI, Sir. R.E. Mortimer Wheeler came to Puducherry. He has a chance of viewing Aritine type red collared potsherds which were displayed in the Puducherry City Library. As a result, the colonial region of British with the permission from the Indo-French Government under the leadership of Wheeler, a systematic and continuous excavation work was conducted at Arikamedu in April, May and June. It was carried out on the basis of scientific method. This excavation became a pioneer for the later years South Indian excavation and the same brought out a new turning point in the history of India.

Those rare objects which were obtained from Arikamedu excavation clearly marked the evidence of Roman trade contact. In history, "Arikamedu" excavation had an important and special place based on new finds. As a result new information and evidences were collected and compiled. The excavation findings were published in a form of report by ASI. (Bi-yearly publication: Ancient India No.2 July 1946). According to Wheeler, "Arikamedu is the only place where the Roman's commercial contacts related vestiges are found in large quantities in entire India". 3rd Stage Excavation (1947-48). As a continuous work of the 2nd excavation, in 1945, 3rd season excavation was carried out. Regarding this a French excavation commission (Commission des Fouilles) sent a research team from France to Veerampattinam.

As a result, in 1946 October again, excavation research was started. Department of Indo-China excavation director Mr. Henri Marchal reached the excavation site at Arikamedu first and started his work. In 1947, under his leadership in two trial trenches were dug out. It became a joint venture of Mr. J.M. Casal, Mrs. Genevieve Casal and Mr. B. K. Thapar. (ASI) 6

Maritime Trade of Ancient Tamils

From ancient days there was a direct marine trade contact between China and Malabar coast of India, with the help of the seasonal winds. During their occurrence a wide spread marine trade was witnessed from the following places.

- (1) From China to India
- (2) From India to east Asian countries
- (3)

Before the death of the Roman king Augustus in 24 A.D., a well organized sea-trade route was existed. For this many historical evidences are available now.

Those Roman Ships, (Yavanakalams) which came to the Malabar coast of western India were also halted in the coromandal coast for trade purpose. This view is confirmed by the discoveries of Roman coins and Roman country's archaeological artifacts which were obtained from the east & western coasts of India.

Archaeological artifacts from Arikamedu:

The objects which were obtained from the Arikamedu excavation are listed below:

- (1) Pot sherds
- (2) Terra cotta objects
- (3) Glass beads
- (4) Shell bangles
- (5) Bone bangles
- (6) Dyeing vats
- (7) Ivory objects
- (8) Toy objects made out of Clay
- (9) Roman's Amphorare
- (10) Roman's Pavai – Vilakku(A lamp was carried by a young lady)
- (11) Wooden hammer
- (12) Ring well

Even today, on the banks of the river which runs near this Arikamedu site, a ruined brick wall structure is seen. Based on the artifacts from Arikamedu, it is understood that ancient "Puducherry" city people had a highly civilized and led a very good cultural life. They were also possessed the aesthetic sense in the field of paintings and sculptures.(1)

Though the Arikamedu port city, Romans did their land trade with ancient traders of India and conducted off-shore marine trade with many other countries. The Roman trade contacts were recorded or referred in Indian literature and foreign accounts. Both the Indian literatures and foreigners accounts were inter-exchanged themselves. For example, Sangam Age literature is considered as a very special literature in south India. Patinappaalai, Puranaanuru and Akhanaanuru (149 – 7-11), Silappathikaaram, Manimegalai (19, 107 – 108) registered the history of Kaveripoompatinam. The Pukar trade with the Roman Empire, other Arab countries and eastern oriental countries were clearly listed and narrated in the contents of the Sangam age texts. The poetic verses in such Sangam texts refer to the ancient maritime trade activities. Particularly Natrinai (58 : 5) mentions about "Virampattinam", port city. This place may be the Arikamedu, which was located in the eastern coast where the river Arikamedu merges with the Bay of Bengal Sea. (Estuary). The "Akham", poetic verses denote this place as, "Viraimunthurai Vaelirukku Sondhamanadhu". (The port city of Virai belonged to the Vaelir who controlled the land in front of the sea).(2) It also represents the presence of salt pans here and there during that time.

Sinamkezhuthanaivelian
Iranguneerpangankanal am
Perunthurai adupoeravaelirviraimunthurai.....(Akhanaanuru)

(Virampattinam existed as a port and posses an oasis). From this it is understood that “Virai”, existed as a port city which was located on the coast .Virai refers to Virampattinam. Thus, the present day Arikamedu was once a part of Virampattinam or Virai or the whole city of Virai. It also evidences that the Virai port city was flourished as a big port.(3)

Apart from this *Paṭṭiṇappālai*, *Puranaanuru* (56, 17 – 20) poetic verses narrate the trade commodities which were brought in and brought out (import and export) via *Kavirippumpattinam*. What kinds of trade goods were imported via sea by the traders are mentioned particularly in the following verses, How these imported mercantile goods were exchanged with the other country’s goods were also well described in such poems.

e.g. *Akhanaanuru*: (7 – 10)

“Thalli Am Paeriyatruvennuraikalanga

Vanarthanthavilaimaannankalam

Ponnoeduvandhukariyoedupeyarum

Pariyoeduvanthukariyoedupeyarnthiru

Vazgkezhumusiriarpuzhaivalaisi”.

The white foamed sea had the huge fine ships which exchanged gold for spices, horse for spices at the ports of Musiri.(4) In addition, it also described the coastal sea city on the banks of river cauvery and its town planning. The residential quarters patterns in the *Kavirippumpattinam* were well explained with best words in such literatures. Particularly Romans, Greeks, Arab and Chines traders came and stayed (Yavanarlukkai – a settlement place of Yavanas) in their owned settlement area. Thus, traders from other countries had a trade link with ancient India’s ports.(5)

Let us now have a glimpse of how the glory of the ancient city of Pukār is told in literatures some 1800 years ago. The *Paṭṭiṇappālai* talks of the following subjects:

The Glory of Kāviri,

The Fertility of *Marutam* land,

Cōḷanāḍu: the Groves, Ponds and Tanks,

‘Aṭṭilcālaika!’ (Feeding House),

‘Tavappaḷḷi’ (Meditation Centers),

Activities of the Maṛavar (gymnasiums),

Puṛaccēri (outskirts of the city),

Settlement of Fishermen (*paṛatavar*),

Events of the Daily Life,

Events of the Night,

Toll houses,
Markets (selling all commodities and precious gems)
Flags (the Model City may provide for Flags of all nations),
The Peasant (their life style)
The City Kāvrippūmpaṭṭiṇam,
Greatness of Tirumāvalavaṇ (Karikālaṇ)
Ruined *maṇḍapas* and so on.

Talking of the fame of the City for its fair dealing in commercial activities the following words are added (*Paṭṭiṇappālai* ll. 213-219):

The traders, men of goodwill who observe
The golden rule and behave like the yoke's central pin;
Truthful for their good name of their class;
Dealing justly with what are theirs and what is others;
Not buying unfairly, nor giving short of measure,
Declaring their modest profits openly,
Live here in numbers large, with wealth long earned,
Merchants from other lands, we versed in tongues
Other than their own, having sojourned in other climes
Live in this city of ceaseless splendor manifold
In loving amity with the townsfolk...[6]

The above citation from the *Pattinappalai* says traders in the ancient city were fair in their dealing.

- e.g. 1. Masuli pattinam (Andhra pradesh)
- 2. Kalingam (Orissa)
- 3. Marakanam (pudhucherry)
- 4. Puducae (puducherry)

All the above said ancient ports were mentioned in Ancient India 1960 –1965– 69).(7)

Amphora jar used by Greeks and Romans.(8) The rouletted (English name) and Aritine potteries were discovered from this Arikamedu port city. In addition to the exploration in this Arikamedu port city, excavations were carried out by the following persons:

- (1) French expert Mr. J.M. Casal
- (2) R.E. Martimer Wheeler
- (3) K.V. Raman, University of Madras and Pennsylvania University Professor Ms. Vimala Begley (joint venture by the two educational institutions collaboration)

All of them confirmed the presence of the above said potteries resembles those excavation findings(10).By this we can understand the used potteries of Greeks and Romans . Their spread in India(our country), evidenced the trade contacts between these countries. They are considered as an unshakable historical vestiges. More over the potsherds bearing the script namely Kannanand saathanpalaeographically that these inscribed shreds were belonged to 1st century A.D.

It should be mentioned that the Roman Pottery Aritine was manufactured at ARIZZO, a place in Italy during the early century of Christian era 1st Century AD. It was not manufactured previously or after that period, where ever they are found in the world clearly shows their spread and presence, which confirmed the trade contacts of Romans and other countries. By this, if more Aritine potsherds and other such objects found in the other parts excavations, discoveries can help us to do a comparative study of the Ancient merchantice, trade contacts can be made analyzed. (In case, the occurrence of more evidences from different perth of the world also had a comparative outlook). Literaries by Ptolemy, Greek Scholor, *Pura Nanuru*, Aka Nanuru etc., Periplus, Maris, Etrithriyan, Malaengal, Mylarba (1950 A.D) reveals that many ancient port cities were existed in the ancient Tamil country particularly from Kanyakumari to Chennai. Some important cities are as follows:-

Kullaththurai, Eyirpattinam, Arikamedu, *Kavirippumpattinam*, Tondi, Marungai, Korkkai, Kumari.

By this it is evidenced that the above said ports of ancient Tamil country did a busy trade with the western countries. The term, “Yavanar”, is mentioned many times in ancient Tamil literatures (Cankam).(10) Roman coins were discovered from these port cities. In addition they were occurred in the following places:

Arikamedu, Karaikkadu, Sengamedu, Kottaimedu, Azhagankulam, Vasavasamudram, Vellaamurkodumanal, Kanjipuram, Poombuhar, Korkkai, Karur, Madurai, Pudukkottai, Velluur, Chennai, Mayilapore, Mambalam, Uraiyur, Paerur and Vijayamangalam.

Roman coins were found In Kerala, Vanji, Musiri, Thondi, Pattinam, Kottaiyam and Akki allure. Such coins were found in Andrapradesh, Nellore and Nangthaspar. In Karnataka, Chandravalli and Akkappalli are the places where the same was recovered. Certain Greek words were found in ancient Tamil literatures. Ancient barter system was in favor of ancient India. Kaveripoompattinam received many imported goods Via sea from different countries . In addition taxes and gold was also imported. Akil, Pearl and Thukil were exported . From Rome, silver and gold coins were exchanged for ornaments

and other accessories .Because, Roman ladies were fond of such things from Tamil Nadu. Roman politicians were condemned their behavior. Even Tamil people wished to receive many things from Rome.(11)

Among them Lady lamps (PaavaiVilakku), Time measuring instruments and foreign labourers were imported for the Tamil Country. Manimegali refers to, “YavanarThatchchar”. In the above said port cities, “Arikamedu”, existed as an important port. Arikamedu excavation and research confirmed the place as once flourished as port city. During the period between the early years of 1st Century A.D. and the early phase of 2nd century A.D. it had a busy trade contact with Romans. It was located on the estuary of the river Ariyankuppam. Thus, Arikamedu flourished as a very popular port city, when there was not enough on the merging place of the river Ariyankuppam and the sea. This important port city also witnessed the busy foreign trade of those days. Dr. Iyappan , was the 1st person who first referred Virampattinam research site as, “Arikamedu”, . This article, which was published in Hindu magazine , dated 23.03.1941 under the heading, “ DhakshinaTaxila (Historic Relics from Arikamedu) “. Pliny (77 A.D) mentions , “Musiri”, as an important port city. In the later half of the 1st century , Tamil Country had “ Contract market”, (EmoriaNomina) . This was mentioned in the book , “Periple De La MerErythree) (80 – 89 A.D). More over the term, “ Market”(Emoria) , was used by MattilPaththoelemae in 150 A.D.

In 24 A.D. 120 cargo ships were sailed for trade journey at the same time, from , “MyosHormos”, port city . They crossed the Red sea and then reached India.Strabon, the Greek Historian gave this description .The artifacts from this site research provides special references on their own. Along with other potteries, Arezzo potsherds were also found. Previously found Augustus Emperor’s ring stone and the occurrence of Arezzo potsherds indicates the commercial trade contact between the western countries and coromandal coast during 1st century A.D.

Archaeological Survey conducted the second phase of excavation in 1945 (April to June) in this site. It revealed the different types of the residential quarters and their patterns . They helped to confirm the correct cultural chronology of this place. Because, this excavation research was carried on the basis of “Stratigraphy”, of layers. The layers above and below the Stratigraphy showed the presence of , “ double handled Amphora jars”, But, Arezzo potsherds were not found. They were made by Romans.

From the Arikamedu excavation vestiges, researchers formulated the following facts:

- *Augustus emperor consolidated the western European countries

- * The trade contact between India and Italy was expanded

Both these facts were inter related and happened at the same period of time.(12)

According to the 1941, Excavation Report, a , “Ware Housing Station”, was existed in this place. Another important feature of this Stratigraphy was the presence of double side handled Amphora jars. In addition to this, Rouletted plates were found in a large number. On the basis of geographical grounds, a city was existed in the coromandal coast and it had a trade contact with the western countries. More over the site where excavation research was carried was the same place which was mentioned and referred in Periplus and Ptolemy. i.e. Podukae.(13)

So, Virampattinam excavation site was also known as, "Podukae", by historians. This interpretation was their own opinion. Another truth which was revealed by this excavation was the flow of South western seasonal winds. (Monsoonal winds). This was known to the sailors of western countries before the 41 A.D. Based on the dyeing vat, which was discovered from the excavation site the following facts were derived:

The dyeing vat structures were repaired in the later period. Evidences for such thing was present.

- In the same place, the second trial trench below the first excavated trench, two different types of brick structures were found in the Stratified deposit.
- The bricks found in the upper part were in ruined condition. Below this bricks of earlier period were seen in compact. (i.e. in good condition). These bricks resembles those bricks which were discovered in the previous stone age research.
- So, based on similar features which are present in many objects we can come to a conclusion that the site was once an industrial site.
- 1st Century A.D. onwards, brick laid civil structures were built on the estuary of a river . It might be a very famous and important port city which enjoys the sea – trade contacts with the western countries.
- In the south direction of this city, during 1st century B.C. to 2nd century A.D. a kind of thickly populated settlement might have flourished. In this village, utilizing the advantages of a river side, majority of fishermen could have lived once.
- Only very big foreign ships were anchored in the deep points of the river's estuary. As the result this port city was expanded . The prosperity and the foreign trade attraction boosted the city to grow and develop in the south direction. This movement of a town contributed the development of a new settlement in to a big city.
- In due course of time this city was gradually covered by sand. So the port city further moved in southern direction. The existed small village was gradually dissolved in the newly emerged big city. This opinion was confirmed by many historians and researchers.

Above said research work was done by Marshal. It s an important excavation. Because, he discovered painted potsherds from the Stratigraphy level. Before this excavation these type of potsherds were not found. The 1945 excavation did not yield any such potsherds.

By this we should understand that these structural building patterns and their brick sizes (length and breath) along with the potsherds which were obtained from the stratigraphy level . Based on this 1945 excavation research reveals the following cultural sequences in this site.

Roman period or middle first sub – division possessed the above said findings.

Belonged to a period slightly before the end phase of the 1st Century A.D.

In this research site, most of the structural remains and other artifacts were obtained from the 8th north Stratigraphy layer. They yielded many artifacts and many meaningful truths of much relevance .

Here more Roman potteries were recovered. Particularly colorfully painted roulette plates along with a large number of Paleolithic potteries.

Huge quantity of artifacts which were obtained from this site confirmed the fact that this site was once engaged in many kinds of industries. Those occupations were also flourished here. (Textile industry – dyeing vat)

The presence of Ash and metal melting structures etc., reveals that the site was once enjoyed the work of the labours and metal casting works.

More over, smelting furnaces, nails, iron sheets, copper rods etc., tells more about the site's metal industry.

Thesite also provides many glass pieces and glass smelting apparatus. They confirmed the presence of ,”Glass industry”.

Stone cutting polishers and jewellery makers (gold smiths) did their profession in this place. It was evidenced by the following materials which were recovered from the site.

- (i) Scattered ring stones
- (ii) Ring Pearls
- (iii) Ornaments
- (iv) Carnelian stones
- (v) Diamond
- (vi) Saffirre
- (vii) Quartz crystal

Ivory workers were also lived there. But well made objects made from ivory antiquities are very small in size. So the real use of these are yet to be known.

In addition, Shell objects and ornaments were manufactured in this site. A crescent like shaped artifact was seen in this site.

The above said same shell ornaments were were occurred in Mysore and Hyderabad.

In addition, along with the iron implements , very fine well finished stone celt was recovered. By this we can understand that the extended usage of the age old stone tools of the Neolithic people.

Both decorated and non – recorded fish fins were recovered from this site.

Highly ornamented fish fins were obtained. They were well washed and the fin's out growths were removed before they are converted I to disc like artifacts. They resemble the ear studs (Kammal) of the women folk of Tamilnadu.

In addition,certain types of very big patrakundalas , which were made from terracotta were discovered. This is also wear in the ear lobes. They were seen in Temple sculptures.

Cattle knee joint bones were also made as certain objects.

The above said archaeological excavation, vestiges really made the archaeologists, historians to get astonished. The artifacts recovered from the place called “ Paalanthaen”,belonged to 2nd century B.C.

They resembles the vestiges of Arikamedu and Virampattinam. More over, the artifacts in the Rome museum are equally compared with the archaeological vestiges of Arikamedu and Virampattinam. In this study, it is studied that fish fins and bone ornaments with special highly decorated designs. Archaeologists and Historians used Proton magneto meter, Sonar magneto meter and Echo – sounder to study the Stratigraphy researches. By this the trade contact between Arikamedu and Rome are scientifically researched by them.(14)

Conclusion:

With the help of the research works, new comers from other countries to India were studied well. During the 18th century Greeks and Romans along with Christian missionaries and traders reached to this destination by sea routes. By them Tamil Nadu enjoyed the trade contacts. The artifacts which were discovered from excavation, reflects the trade contact between Tamilnadu, Greek and Rome. These hints are treated for oceanic history sources to write the trade contacts of Tamilnadu.

Notes and References:

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3. Jouveau Dubreuil Les ruins de Pondicherry, 1941.
4. Begley V. and Richard Daniel De Puma eds. Rome and India. The Ancient Sea Trade (Madison, 1991)
5. Ibid
6. M. Raghunathan, *Six Long Poems from Sangam Tamil* (Madras 1978), pp. 63-64.
7. Ancient India, Vol – 2, July – 1946, A.S.I. New Delhi – PP
8. Amphorae jars were ancient European storage jars. They were used to store grains and liquid (Sprit and oil), particularly in Travel by Europeans. It is a kind of a jar. In the upper part two handles were present. It is an unique feature of this jar. The word, Amphorae”, is derived from a Greek word.
9. Rouletted plates were made by awelllavigated clay. They will produce metal sounds when it was stricken. It is an important feature of this kind of pottery. At the base, very fine paintings were painted in circles.
10. K.V.Zvelebil “The Yavanas in old Tamil Literature”, *Charisteria Orientalia Prahai* 1965.
11. Vimala Begley, “New Investigation at the art of Arikamedu “, in *Journal of Roman Archaeology*, Michigami, Vol. 6, 1993.
12. Auguste, the Roman emperor’s name was written in Latin in a Roman coin. He was born in 63 B.C at Rome. He was died at Nela in 14 A.D.
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